

A Hot Topic Podcast: Addressing Heat Vulnerability in the Capital Regional District (CRD)

(Introduction) Kirsten & Sarah

00:00

Erica: Welcome to A Hot Topic: Addressing Heat Vulnerability in the Capital Regional District, also known as the CRD. Thank you for being here. I am your host. Erica Dolman, a researcher, equity advocate and resident of Victoria, located in the CRD in British Columbia, or BC, Canada.

Before we begin, it is important to acknowledge the land on which this podcast was recorded and produced. We as a research team, acknowledge and respect the Lək'wəŋən (Songhees and Xwsepsem/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək'wəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

I live and work on this unceded and stolen territory. I think of how some people may not consider their relation to the land until they experience a threat to their proximate environment, like an extreme heat event. As I work, play and live on this land, I sometimes feel struck as a white settler by how much I take from the land without considering my place on it and how to take care of it with this self-awareness and curiosity I practice being present as much as I can, approaching people and life with patience, listening, expressing gratitude for the land I live on, and other land that I do and will visit, and by engaging in efforts to integrate indigenous ways of being and knowing into my community by prioritizing relationships, having respect for all living things, understanding the cyclical nature of knowledge, and remembering the value of traditional knowledge passed down through generations. As I recently finished my master's thesis, which centered on the importance of connection between one another during extreme heat events. This project cannot be shared without an understanding, acknowledgement, and appreciation of the land on which extreme weather events occur, and the encouragement to turn to each other when the next one comes. Though this research discusses the geographical area of the CRD as its frame of reference, I want to highlight that extreme weather events are experienced worldwide because of climate change and extends and effects beyond the constraints of borders.

This podcast series explores the stories of community members, particularly priority populations, or those disproportionately affected by extreme heat events in the CRD and their experiences of the 2021 heat dome, here on referred to as the heat dome. The heat dome was the most extreme heat event experienced in BC and had profound effects on our communities and the land we live on. This podcast was made because we, as a research team, and community members of the CRD believe that understanding the experiences and needs of priority populations can bridge gaps in policies that can further exacerbate the vulnerability of these populations who suffer disproportionately during extreme weather events.

From June 25 to July 1, 2021 BC experienced Canada's most deadly extreme heat event, causing a record 619 deaths, as noted by the BC Coroner's Service in their 2022 report titled, "Extreme heat and human mortality: A review of heat related deaths in BC in summer 2021." Extreme heat events, or EHEs, or extreme heat emergencies, are when, quote, "daytime and nighttime temperatures get hotter every day and are well above seasonal norms." Unquote, as defined by the Government of BC. The heat dome differed from typical heat waves as it resulted in record breaking heat, including the highest recorded temperature in Canada of 49.6 degrees Celsius in Lytton, BC, and there was no relief or respite from the heat as the temperatures remained high through the night. Most of the deaths caused by the heat dome were people over the age of 70 who were living alone had compromised health due to chronic diseases and no access to cooling. Almost all of these deaths occurred within people's homes. Its impact was felt beyond human fatalities and included, quote, "... mass mortalities of marine life reduced crop and fruit yields river flooding from rapid snow and glacier melt and a substantial increase in wildfires, the latter contributing to landslides in the months following." This quote comes from an article published by Rachel H White and other authors titled, "The unprecedented Pacific Northwest heat wave of June 2021," that can be found online. There were also infrastructural failures, such as power outages, double the average amount of emergency medical calls, and increased hospitalization, all while COVID 19 restrictions were still in place.

Whether you are a community member in the CRD working as a local policy and decision maker or beyond, we invite you to tune in, to listen to the stories of priority populations, lived experiences of extreme heat events, and engage in a practice of collective policy listening. We hope you resonate with the theme of connecting within community when navigating extreme weather events, we, as a research team, chose to share these stories by way of a podcast, to bring the interviews to the public through an accessible format, such as a podcast to increase the amplification of these stories. This series is an example of how podcasting can be used as a climate change communication tool for priority populations to share their lived experiences of the heat dome with local policy and decision makers and can contribute to what we refer to as policy listening.

Before we jump into hearing stories, let's define a few terms. First, in the context of this series, priority populations, or those disproportionately affected by extreme heat events, includes, but is not limited to socially isolated seniors, those with perinatal lived experience, such as pregnant or nursing people, Indigenous people, those living rurally, those who take medication that may make them sensitive to extreme heat, and unhoused or precariously housed individuals.

Another important term to define is policy listening. Policy listening is a process where policy makers actively seek and incorporate input from community members and leaders into policy decisions. It involves a commitment to understanding diverse perspectives and experiences, to shape policies that are responsive to community needs.

You may be thinking, where do I, Erica, as the host and producer of this podcast, fit into the heat dome? The week of the heat dome was the hottest temperatures I had experienced in my whole life of living in BC, Canada, I was working as a crew boss for a tree planting company in northern BC. We were in the process of setting up camp in preparation for our upcoming summer planting contract. Being constantly outdoors during the heat dome gave us no escape

from the heat. We were five hours down a Forest Service Road with the nearest town being Mackenzie, BC, the only reprieve from the heat was the Osoyinka River, where our camp was situated. Every 15 to 20 minutes, we would jump into the ice, cold, fast, rushing river to keep cool, and then return to camp set up. Without the offerings of the cold water from the river, I don't believe we would have been able to stave off heat related illnesses or worse, other than the surrounding trees, the only available shade came from canvas tent structures that we constructed in the heat. Luckily, our planters were not planting during this week, as we had to move camps from the Chilcotin area up north. But at least a quarter of the people in our 70-person camp, assisted with setup, or were otherwise languidly hiding in the shade and drinking water with electrolytes or salt, or taking regular dips in the river, or both. Though I grew up on the unceded territory of the Syilx nation or in the interior in Vernon, BC, Canada, which has a dry, hot climate, nothing in my living memory compared to this level of heat.

This was an experience shared by many others, including co lead researcher of the hot topic, Dr Sarah Marie Wiebe, who was a new mother at the time of the heat dome and struggled from dehydration and other ailments while supporting her baby, as explained in her book, *Hot Mess: Mothering Through a Code Red Climate Emergency*, also available as an audiobook. She found it difficult to find information and access resources that could support her during this time, which then led her to developing this research project in collaboration with Kirsten Mah, a local community organizer and healthy communities' planner also interested in the impacts of extreme heat events on local priority populations. Hence, a hot topic was born.

Okay, so where did this project come from? This podcast series builds off of previous research titled a hot topic addressing heat vulnerability to extreme heat exposure in the Capital Regional District, conducted by a research team that I am a part of, as well as Sarah and Kirsten from the University of Victoria and the CRD Community Health Network focused on gathering data of priority populations, lived experiences of the heat dome to ensure this existing research drove appropriate equity, informed policy creation. A Hot Topic's research team entered the next phase of the project by creating and developing a podcast. This podcast to amplify the voices of those most impacted by extreme heat to explore how priority populations lived experiences can serve as a climate change communication tool. At the time of this project's inception, there hadn't been much research focused on sharing lived experiences and stories.

Okay, let's back up what is the background of this project. The recommendations that resulted from the Hot Topic survey and sharing circles centered on how extreme heat events and other environmental hazards may disproportionately affect those at heightened risk for negative health impacts. You can read more about this in Sarah and Kirsten's report on communitybasedresearch.ca titled, *A Hot Topic: Feeling the impacts of extreme heat*. The recommendations centered on landlord and strata changes, tailored support for pets, the need for a multitude of publicly available cooling spaces, the need for comprehensive employer responsibilities that are industry specific and include making accommodations for their staff, such as the adjustment of hours, providing more breaks and providing cold water, the government tailoring communication campaigns to different audiences and in a diversity of formats, and lastly, the identification of vulnerable or priority populations should be made so that they can be checked in on and the need for the creation of mutual aid support systems that

encourage connection and responsibility to each other within neighborhoods, as noted in Sarah and Kirsten's report. Mentioned previously, these recommendations were a call to action to increase public engagement, specifically those that are members of priority populations in community planning and for policy makers and provincial and municipal governments to develop specific policy legislation or mandated obligations for the existing environment, not the environment that was, could be, or should be policies that are as diverse as the members of the communities they seek to serve are an integral part of developing equitable policy outcomes.

This research matters because there is an enormous gap between those that passed away because of the effects of the heat dome and those with single unit family homes who could install heat pumps or modify their dwellings to comfortably get through the heat dome. There is a whole population of people in between with experiences and stories that have yet to be heard by way of a podcast, and that is why this project came to be to expand the narratives of these findings. The Hot Topic team received funding to design and produce a podcast centered on the voices of members of priority populations to tell their stories of their lived experiences during the heat dome. As you'll hear in this episode's conversation, Sarah and Kirsten acknowledge that the effects of the heat dome are not confined to these two ends of the spectrum, of those who own single family homes and those who died as a result of the heat dome, but that there were groups in between vulnerable or priority populations in the context of this study that weren't studied thoroughly until the onset of the hot topic project, my master's thesis project, sought to take the findings of a hot topic to add personal context and a platform for those disproportionately affected by the heat dome to have an opportunity to express themselves and to amplify their stories. Hence, this project emerged.

The solutions that resulted from each interview in this podcast series stress the importance of community connection and effective communication with priority populations before, during and after extreme heat events in the context of interviewees, responses, building community and strong personal relationships were mentioned repeatedly, as well as tailoring communication sources that reflect the diversity of the community, these sources seek to serve particularly priority populations who are disproportionately more susceptible to adverse effects of climate change. One of the main tenets of this research was to meet interview participants where they were at. This meant that the research was taken to the field, like to people's homes and offices. The audio of the interviews reflects this, with each interview having background noise specific to the environment in which the interviews were recorded, like the clinking sound of a spoon hitting the rim of a mug at Eva Shaffer's home, or Maggie Gay playing 70s music on her television in the background. These elements created an atmospheric and immersive quality to the audio recordings and emphasized the role of space and place in influencing and affecting one's experience. Speaking with people in these spaces demonstrated the uniqueness of their lived experience and the distinct nature of each person's lives. Please consider this when listening and note that the sound quality of the interviews is far from perfect, and that that is an intentional part of the listening experience.

Through this podcast, we intend to communicate with local policy and decision makers to share the stories of priority populations, experiences of extreme heat events. The interview you're about to hear now seeks to offer background and context to the hot topic. Project, once again,

through storytelling, let's hear from a hot topic addressing heat vulnerability in the capital Regional District. CO leads Kirsten MA and Dr Sarah Marie Wiebe. To learn more about this project,

15:29

Kirsten: My name is Kirsten Mah. I work in local government, in community health planning, so I focus on all different determinants of health, and we know that the climate crisis is a major determinant of health that we are now facing in the community. Outside of my job, I also do a lot of community building in my spare time, because I believe that having a strong social safety net and community is the best protective factor when we're facing all kinds of different challenges, including climate action.

16:02

Sarah: And I'm Sarah Marie Wiebe, an assistant professor here in the School of Public Administration. I've had the pleasure of working with Kirsten and Erica for the past few years now on extreme heat related research from a community engaged research perspective, and I have really appreciated working together. This research builds on my own lived experience becoming a new parent during the 2021 heat dome. So, for me, that was really a focusing event that shifted my research agenda in a direction to care much more intimately and deeply about extreme weather events and extreme heat. Okay,

16:41

Erica: Amazing, and welcome both of you to the podcast. It's nice to work behind the scenes so much, and then now we get to have your voices here. So, how did each of you become involved in extreme heat research?

16:57

Kirsten: I think the heat dome of 2021, was a, it was a big event for everyone. I remember laying on the floor in a basement because it was very hot, but my experience was not as extreme as many people. And kind of why I became involved in extreme heat was after the heat dome. A lot of the conversation focused on either heat pumps or people who unfortunately passed away during the heat dome. And while both of those things are important, I think there was a lot of space in between those experiences like heat pumps, people who have the money and are have all the protective factors to still remain cool, and then the other extreme of the people who passed away, I think in between those two ends of the spectrum, there's a lot of experiences and stories that are important that we're not being told. So that's why I got involved in this. Additionally, through my work, I convene a bunch of different local government climate action planners, and there was a keen interest in understanding better, understanding who's most vulnerable to the health impacts of extreme heat, and hearing from them directly.

18:19

Sarah: So amazing. And I recall, after returning to work at the University of Victoria, I believe it was 2022 somebody from the research mobilization and Knowledge Translation office said, hey, there's this community leader that wants to partner and do extreme heat related research. I thought, well, this is something I know a little bit about. And so, I responded right away and said, yes, I'm keen to hear more, and I'd love to collaborate. And I was just back after parental leave

and rethinking my own research agenda and what I wanted to focus all my time on. And I recalled myself, you know, being a nursing parent and struggling with extreme heat and dehydration and running ice baths and trying to keep cool, trying to keep an infant cool, and not having that many resources. And I thought, well, if, if myself, as a highly educated person with a PhD doesn't really know where to find good information about how to keep cool and how to care for a newborn or an infant, I'm probably not alone. And it really got me reflecting on vulnerability. And while I would not self-identify as a vulnerable person, now, I definitely felt vulnerable in that moment, and those kind of confusing emotions of you know, love for a new being, concern for the planet, concern for the well-being of our family, motivated me to do some writing and reflection as well, which led to my book, hot mess smothering through a code red climate emergency, and something that Kirsten and I have talked a lot about over the years is how it is a matter of life and death, but that's not the only story. There are stories of community building and resilience, and so we're really interested in that kind of gradient of lived experience and how people come together, support each other, check on one another, and build care during those extreme weather events.

20:04

Erica: Amazing. Both of your areas of work are so interesting, and I'm so glad to be a part of it as well. So, with regard to this research, we interviewed some members of our community in order to make podcasts. So why do you think making a podcast is important, and how does it relate to your larger bodies of work?

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Kirsten: So, my background is working in program evaluation, and in program evaluation, I focused a lot on reporting back to the people who are giving feedback so that we could verify that we heard them correctly. I think oftentimes research results in giant reports that are not accessible to the people who were researching or our subjects. In this case, we looked at people who were learning English, or we interviewed people who were learning English. We talked to people who have small children, so maybe just don't have the time to read a report. And there's a whole spectrum of people that we talk to that we don't know when their literacy levels, their patience, their interest. So, creating a podcast, to me, is a really important component of our knowledge translation, especially when it comes to the people that we talked to and we interviewed, it's really important to me that we share information back with them in a way that they can understand, that they can access. In addition, even people who are highly educated, who work in government, are local climate action people, they don't always have the time, or sometimes maybe not the interest in reading a long report. So having opportunities for people to engage in information in different ways is, I think, key for helping move the recommendations forward and to actually spark change.

21:59

Erica: The recommendations Kirsten mentions are those that come from each episode of the lived experience of the community members on the podcast series. As a reminder, these recommendations are for local policy and decision makers to improve the circumstances for priority populations through creating more equitable policy outcomes.

22:21

Sarah: Yeah, and I recall after we kind of wrapped up our reporting together, and we had a gathering and the planning session, action planning session, thought, now what? How do we translate this information into ways that can move the conversation forward in concrete ways and connect with policy makers and decision makers and also reach wider publics as well. So, I think the purpose of the podcast is multi fold, but perhaps at least two audiences come to mind. You know, one being participants of the research and the broader public as well. So, people who may have had lived experience, and perhaps most of us have had lived experience of extreme weather events in some way but thinking about those who are vulnerable and how their stories can further connect to policy makers. So, policy makers being the second audience, and I've just really come to appreciate how stories are so powerful, and they can really move people. And even while we were doing our sharing circles and conversations with different groups across the region, I love sharing the story of meeting an elderly gentleman who was just not interested in this topic at first, and he said, I'm not participating in your study, I'm not doing the survey, I'm not completing the questionnaire, I'm not, you know, going to be part of this dialog. But then I got up and did a little intro and shared my story, and it shifted his perspective, and he participated and said, this is really important. And so got me thinking about how podcasting can be an avenue for sharing stories and connecting people's lived experience to different audiences. And we've come together to think a little bit about policy listening, and I suppose that leads to...

24:03

Erica: As a reminder, policy listening is a term used in the scope of this research to identify the intended audience of policies, or who or what populations certain policies are meant to be for, and how to integrate those population stories and perspectives into creating equitable policy outcomes.

24:22

Sarah: ... Our further discussion of, you know, the audience being policy makers. And I believe that policy makers do listen to podcasts, and they might read reports for sure and cross reference them, but we want to make policy dynamic and fun and engaging and relatable, and so I think a podcast is a great way to do that. And like Kirsten said, too, sometimes you're really busy and you don't have time to sit down and read around a report or read a book. And definitely, I recall, is a new parent, similarly, not having my hands free and listening to a lot of audio books and podcasts. So, I want us to make this information as accessible as possible, while also really highlighting the importance of people's stories and lived experience and. I encourage policymakers to take that seriously.

25:03

Erica: Yeah, absolutely. And, so, you actually kind of touched on this already, Sarah. So, who are you hoping to reach, or who is your audience for this podcast? And Sarah, you did mention a few different community groups, and what are your what are you hoping the listener hears, takes away or listens for when engaging with this podcast?

25:26

Kirsten: I think, yeah, we mentioned some of the groups. So, the people who we're actually

talking about in the podcasts or in our research, policy makers, decision makers, and just the broader public, I think there's become this growing apathy towards climate change, and so having people actually understand and hear from people who are directly impacted by these events will hopefully spark some change and maybe help us move away from that apathy. Another component, I think part of the apathy is because people see that like governments aren't doing things and there's kind of this despair. But hopefully some of the stories that we share can show how people can come together to support one each other, one another, and care for their community. I hope that the people who participated in the research see themselves in the podcast. I want people to feel like they're being heard. I want people to feel like people are taking them seriously and people care about them. And I would like policy makers and decision makers to care about them. So, I think, yeah, I want people to take away and kind of spark action and hopefully use stories to overcome feelings of despair.

26:54

Sarah: Yeah, and I'd like us to get this in the hands of our mayor here, and maybe the leader of the CRD and board members. And definitely our primary audience is the capital regional, district region, and that includes many municipalities, many First Nations, the board of the CRD so that's kind of our scope. But within that, of course, there's different layers. So, those who have been part of the podcast, we definitely want to amplify their voices and connect them to those decision makers and policy makers, and create those, I guess, safe space for conversations about climate change and extreme weather events and show that you're not alone. You know, during the heat dome, it was also during COVID There was wildfire smoke at times coming from California, I recall just before the heat dome. And so, there are these layers of crises, and it's easy to feel disengaged or disempowered. And so, we really want to show how there are multiple people going through these experiences, and there's space to kind of share and talk through them. And I've also been thinking about policy as well, and how can we cultivate space for empathy in policy? Because so often it's been this really technocratic, technical kind of exercise of impact assessments and all these really cold terms. And so we really want to cultivate space for this deep listening, or policy listening, something that we've talked about a lot, and so I really see the podcast as this act of policy listening, and we will definitely try to get the podcast in the hands of those decision makers so they're more connected to the lived experiences and stories of those who are most directly affected by extreme weather.

28:37

Erica: Well, that's a great segue into our next question here. So, with regard to policy listening, in terms of integrating local priority populations voices, what does policy making or policy listening mean to you?

28:53

Kirsten: You go first.

Sarah: This is something that's been so fun to chat with Erica and Kirsten about policy listening, and I recall actually doing your thesis defense, Erica, the Chair of Political Science, being there, and like, wow, what a cool term. And so, you heard it here first on the podcast policy listening, because so often in our democratic society, there's just so much performance and elitism and hierarchical modes of decision making and governance, and it's hard as citizens to know how to

access those channels of decision making and kind of policy generation. And so, we see ourselves as a bit of a bridge here, trying to bridge between different knowledges, those elite decision-making knowledges, and those on the ground with their lived experience, and highlight how situated knowledge really matters, and people are the experts of their own lived experience and stories. And policy makers really need to learn how to listen to that kind of knowledge and respect it. And so often I've asked policy makers, what kind of evidence do you need to, you know, make a recommendation, as they say, you know, peer-reviewed academic articles or scientific studies. And I'm now advocating, while teaching a policy course, that the students need to put different kinds of evidence in their briefing material. So, sure, you need the statistics, but you also need the stories. And there's a whole movement around knowledge democracy, and we need to shout out and give credit to Budd Hall for that research, because it's so critical. And so, I really see policy listening as contributing to that knowledge democracy movement.

30:25

Kirsten: I agree. One thing that we talk about a lot is lived experience, and we need to hear the voices of lived experience, but academia is so inaccessible to people who have, I mean, lived experience is a weird term, even to me, because of what. And I think it's not an academia is not an accessible place for people with lived experience, and the way research is often conducted is not a safe, accessible place for people to be themselves. And so I think having these different opportunities for people to share their stories directly and expanding what people want and what how people make decisions and policy is really important, because on the one hand, we say, Oh, we want lived experience, but then we say, oh, but we can only base things off of peer reviewed articles that talk to like one or two people who are just like rich, white people, and we're saying, Oh, look, lived experience. So, diversifying what we consider when we're making decisions is really important so that we ensure that policies are responding to needs, and so that people feel that they can see or see that people see themselves and their needs represented in the choices that are being made.

31:47

Erica: Yes, totally, and I agree as well. So, you both have spoken about this already, but how can podcasting complement traditional policy processes? So, if you have any other added pieces to add to that?

32:04

Sarah: We're really excited about the launch coming up soon and appreciate everyone tuning in to check that out. I think that'll be a really great way to bring a panel together of listeners and have some community leaders, maybe some students, some planners, some decision makers to listen, they'll have to do their homework and listen to at least an episode beforehand and come prepared to have a discussion about these topics. And so, I think, you know, as a research team, we'll work intentionally to create these spaces of engagement and dialog and discussion. And I know a lot of people listen to podcasts. I was just chatting with our Dean of Social Sciences recently. He said, I love podcasts, so we'll give it to the Dean. You know, there's lots of people in positions of authority in various institutions, whether that's academia or in government, local government, First Nations, governments, etc. We'll be really excited to

share this out, and I think it'll be a nice compliment to some of our reports, which are really great as well and have even more depth and more stories and more data, but sometimes decision makers are really busy, and maybe, again, themselves can't sit down and read a lengthy report, so they want a snapshot, or maybe they've got a commute where they can listen to a podcast. So, we really see this as complementing other forms of knowledge and again, making the stories and experiences accessible and relatable, and also highlighting the urgency of this issue as well, while centering kind of community expertise and care and connection, that's all part of it.

33:33

Kirsten: I think that's something that is missing or has been lost from kind of traditional policy processes, is the importance of relationship. Relationship is super key and important for making good policy, like, for example, when I was talking about lived experience, integrating their voices, but also understanding the landscape of who can do what and implement what is not always part of the policy process. So, I think our podcast can bring a bit of that relationship building back in one because I don't know when I listen to podcasts, I think I have a personal relationship with people talking, which I do not but it does help people understand and connect at a different level. I also think some of the information and the events and relationships that we're building around the podcast launch are key the climate action workers, or climate action staff across the municipalities in our region are really keen, generally, to build relationships and work together. And when we're in a many municipal area like ours, it's important that we foster those relationships in a variety of ways. So, I think podcasting will help with that by sharing stories and bringing people together around one kind of central tool.

34:57

Erica: Absolutely. Well, amazing. Do any... do you, either of you have any further comments or any last thoughts you'd like to share?

35:06

Sarah: We're really excited about this, and hope that listeners are as well. And stay tuned for more stories coming your way. There's going to be some wonderful, heartfelt narratives with different leaders, indigenous leaders, seniors, others who have experienced the heat dome and other extreme weather events in different ways. And I think we're just really excited to hold them up and share their stories, and again, cultivate that community of support. And we look forward to the continued conversations to come.

Kirsten: I agree.

Erica: Amazing. Okay.

35:47

Erica: The purpose behind this podcast series is to mobilize and spark change, and not just hear but to actively listen to voices, perspectives and lived experiences of those disproportionately impacted by extreme heat events, and to share these stories with policy and decision makers so they may engage in a collective co-created practice of policy listening, as you'll hear when you listen to the upcoming stories. We will learn from these interviews about the importance of relationships and community building and creating resources tailored to the

needs of priority populations, as mentioned by Kirsten. Another purpose is to fill the gap between those that passed because of the effects of the heat dome and those with single unit family homes who could install heat pumps. There is a whole population of people in between with experiences and stories that have yet to be heard by way of a podcast, and that is why this project came to be. We look forward to sharing them with you.

Thank you for listening. This episode was produced by me Erica, with the mentorship and guidance of Nicola Watts and support from research co-leads, Kirsten Mah and Dr. Sarah Marie Wiebe, who shared their vision and support for this project and funding was provided through a Michael Smith Health Research BC Reach award thanks to CFUV, 101.9 FM for their distribution support.